

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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O 091041Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE 3470

C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 1329

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : MARR, MASS, BA

SUBJECT : FUTURE OF MIDEASTFOR: INVITATION TO PRIME MINISTER

REF : MANAMA 1291

1. I WAS CALLED BY JAMIL Wafa, BUSINESS MANAGER/CONFIDANTE/HENCHMAN OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF BAHRAIN (SHAIKH KHALIFA BIN SALMAN AL KHALIFA) YESTERDAY AND TOLD THAT HE "URGENTLY" NEEDED TO SEE ME THIS MORNING. HE ARRIVED THIS MORNING (SEPT. 9) WITH THE PASSPORTS OF THE PRIME MINISTER, THE MINISTER OF STATE FOR CABINET AFFAIRS (JAWAD AL-ORRAYED), Wafa, MOHAMMED ZUBARI (FRIEND/ADVISOR TO PM) AND ISA AL-HILO (BODYGUARD/POLICEMAN). HE CARRIED A FORMAL LETTER FROM AL-ORRAYED STATING THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS LEADING "A DELEGATION ON AN UNOFFICIAL VISIT" TO THE UNITED STATES. WE HAVE OF COURSE ISSUED THE VISAS THIS MORNING.

2. AFTER A LENGTHY DISCUSSION OF OTHER MATTERS (WHICH INCLUDED THE PRIME MINISTER'S TRAVEL PLANS -- WHICH ARE STILL THOSE REPORTED IN MANAMA 1274)--Wafa ASKED ME ABOUT THE FUTURE PLANS OF THE NAVY IN BAHRAIN. I SAID THAT AS HE MUST KNOW WE HAD BEEN INFORMED BY THE GOB THAT THE NAVY MUST TERMINATE ITS PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN BY JUNE 30, 1977 AND THAT WE WERE WORKING ON THAT ASSUMPTION. Wafa QUICKLY INTERJECTED THAT HE "SENSED THAT SOMETHING ELSE IS IN THE AIR". HE SAID THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS SCHEDULING SUCH A LONG VISIT TO MIAMI IN THE HOPE THAT HE WOULD BE ABLE TO GO TO WASHINGTON FOR A FEW DAYS OF "SERIOUS DISCUSSIONS" REGARDING THE NAVY. I SAID THAT WE WERE AWARE OF THE PRIME
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MINISTER'S TENTATIVE INTEREST IN MAKING SUCH A VISIT AND THAT,

FRANKLY, WE WERE WAITING FOR INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE THAT SUCH A VISIT WOULD BE PRODUCTIVE AND USEFUL FOR BOTH SIDES. I NOTED THAT THE PRIME MINISTER WAS ALWAYS WELCOME IN WASHINGTON, GIVEN OUR CLOSE RELATIONS, BUT THAT SPECIFICALLY ON THE QUESTION OF THE FUTURE OF MIDEASTFOR IN BAHRAIN, THE EMBASSY WAS AWAITING CONFIRMATION FROM WASHINGTON THAT THE USG WAS READY TO HAVE THE "DEFINITIVE" KIND OF DISCUSSIONS WE HAD BEEN TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER WANTED. I SAID THAT WE CERTAINLY WANTED THE NAVY TO STAY ANOTHER YEAR OR TWO.

3. Wafa NOTED THAT THEIR DEPARTURE DATE (SEPT. 15) WAS DRAWING NEAR AND WONDERED WHEN WE MIGHT BE IN A POSITION TO INFORM THE PRIME MINISTER OF OUR INTENTIONS. I SAID THAT THE USG WAS WELL AWARE OF THE TIMING PROBLEMS AND THAT THE ENTIRE QUESTION OF THE FUTURE OF MIDEASTFOR AND DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER WERE RECEIVING APPROPRIATELY HIGH-LEVEL CONSIDERATION IN WASHINGTON. I ASSURED HIM THAT WE WOULD BE INFORMED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AFTER THE COMPLETION OF THAT CONSIDERATION.

4. COMMENT: I ASSUME THAT Wafa WAS SENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER TO: A) SMOKE OUT OUR INTENTIONS; B) CONVEY THEIR SENSE OF URGENCY (WHICH I JUDGE IS REAL); AND C) TURN THE SCREWS (IN WHICH REGARD Wafa NOTED THAT IT IS "ONLY NINE MONTHS" UNTIL JUNE 1977). IT SEEMS TO US THAT IT WOULD BE VERY MUCH IN THE USG INTEREST TO GIVE THE PRIME MINISTER AN ORDERLY AND TIMELY RESPONSE BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE FOR SINGAPORE IN THE EARLY MORNING OF SEPT. 15. AFTER THAT TIME IT WILL OF COURSE BE POSSIBLE TO DELIVER OUR MESSAGE TO HIM IN SINGAPORE, AUSTRALIA OR NEW ZEALAND. AS FOR THE CONTENT OF OUR DISCUSSIONS WITH THE PRIME MINISTER, WE STILL FEEL THAT IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE USG BE IN A POSITION TO SPEAK WITH ONE VOICE WHICH IS CLEAR IN ITS COMMUNICATION TO THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE LIMITS OF OUR INTEREST IN BAHRAIN AS THE HOME PORT FOR MIDEASTFOR. CONVEYING THAT SENSE OF LIMIT (WITH ITS ATTENDANT PRICE TAG) WILL BE THE CORE OF THE DISCUSSION WITH SHAIKH KHALIFA.

5. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT THE PRIME MINISTER HAS USED Wafa RATHER THAN THE GOB BUREAUCRACY TO ACT AS HIS LIAISON WITH THE EMBASSY. ALTHOUGH THIS IS CERTAINLY IN CHARACTER WITH THE PRIME MINISTER'S PRIVATE BUSINESS PRACTICE, IT SUGGESTS THAT A CONFIDENTIAL

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LIMITED NUMBER OF RULING FAMILY MEMBERS (IMPORTANTLY INCLUDING THE AMIR, THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE HEIR APPARENT) ARE STILL HOLDING THEIR CARDS CLOSE TO THEIR CHESTS VIS-A-VIS THE REST OF THE GOVERNMENT.

6. WHAT FOLLOWS IS PURELY CONJECTURE: I GOT THE DISTINCT IMPRESSION FROM Wafa, WHO IS QUITE ARTICULATE IN ENGLISH, THAT THE BAHRAINIS ARE SOMEWHAT SURPRISED AT OUR SLOWNESS TO

RESPOND TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S INITIATIVE WITH ADMIRAL BIGLEY
AND AMBASSADOR TWINAM. Wafa NOTED IN PASSING THAT "AMERICA IS
VERY IMPORTANT TO BAHRAIN; AND, OF COURSE; (THEATRICAL PAUSE)
BAHRAIN IS VERY IMPORTANT TO AMERICA". IF IT WERE ONLY A
BARGAINING TACTIC, OUR SLOWNESS IN RESPONDING TO THE BAHRAINIS
MAY HAVE BEGUN TO SERVE A USEFUL PURPOSE; I.E., PERHAPS GIVING
A HINT TO THE LIMITS OF OUR INTERESTS -- AND, IPSO FACTO,
HELPING TO SCALE DOWN BAHRAINI EXPECTATIONS. WE SHALL SEE.

BURLEIGH

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